

Greetings:

The study that Pastor Pat brings on Sunday mornings is a reflection of the study for that week. It represents a lot of research. Not all of what he has prepared is communicated. In an attempt to continue the learning process, he is making available his study notes to the congregation.

They are edited, but not “book” ready. To the critical eye mistakes can be found. So he asks that you take the material with humility, teach-ability, and charity.

Enjoy and if you should have any questions or corrections, please do not hesitate to email him at pastorpat@waukeshabible.org.

Date: June 21, 2009

Title: The Structure of the Local Church for the Mission of God - Part 1

Text: Acts 6:1-7; Acts 13:1-4; Acts 20:17, 18, 28; Eph. 4:11-16

Theme: God has placed in geographically defined assemblies/local churches the biblical structure of Elders and Deacons for the purpose of building up His body in the carrying out of His mission.

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Waukesha Bible Church is a family of families seeking to live in **the Storyline of the Bible**. She is determined by design to have a **God-centered, Christ-exalting worship; a Word-centered teaching** focused on personal **discipleship** through intentional and systematic instruction; a **Global-impacting mission** that resolves to be a **church planting church**; and a **Grace-based fellowship** where disciples are invited to live under a **reigning grace** characterized by a **Gospel-driven sanctification** that celebrates a divine **monergism** to the Christian life.

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Introduction:

I wish to lead with an apology. As an Elder I have “dipped my big toe into the water” of this subject matter several times. I have slowly been studying the Scripture to understand what it is that I am now identified by. I have primarily (and almost exclusively) looked only at the Scripture. My study has caused me to have more material than I can cover in one Sunday. Because of the subject matter, I will break it down into two studies. It will not be an exhaustive study, but it will be a beginning. I am sure we will visit this idea again in the days ahead, but we will hopefully begin pouring a foundation on which the structure of the local church can be built. Here is my apology: I am only using the Scripture. I am not looking at what John Piper, Mark Driscoll, Mark Dever, Alexander Strauch, etc. have said. Everyone is going to have an opinion as to what the Scripture teaches on this subject matter. What is biblical will be noted. If it is my opinion, I will try to make sure you know, “It is my opinion, and not the Scripture.”

In any local church there is a tendency to default to a business model of “running the church.” Such language as “management” or “control” is inappropriate to the church. The church is never described as a “business.” It is described as a family and a body. Just as a family has a hierarchy of function and a body has a head, so also the church has definable leadership that directs, leads, and guides.

The Elders and Deacons do not form a system of checks and balances. Each is designed to serve the other by fulfilling their ministry to Christ and His church. The New Testament pictures a church that is in love with Jesus and His people. It is not a flawless or problem free pursuit, but the pursuit is there. A way for the church to function as a church is to understand the ministry of Elder and Deacon.

According to the New Testament record, only Elders have oversight of the flock. Deacons assist in the administration of ministry and resolving structural needs in order to free up the Elders to shepherd the sheep. It is the intent of the Elders of Waukesha Bible Church to be biblically based in her thoughts and structure.

The New Testament Church emphasizes two distinct yet vital offices in her endeavor to carry out the mission of God through the planting of churches locally, nationally, and globally. Consider this small sampling of this idea from three NT references.

“And He gave some as Apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers” (Eph. 4:11).

“Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and Deacons” (Phil. 1:1).

“Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain” (1 Tim. 3:8).

The discussion as to whether or not Apostles, prophets, and evangelists still exist in today’s church is to be left for another study. However, the purpose of the gifting was/is for the equipping of the saints as described in Ephesians 4:11-16. It is believed that the offices are unique to the Local Church. The gifting is not unique to the church, but the offices are. Thus, one might enjoy the gifting without holding the office, but one cannot hold the office without enjoying the gift. All of the gifting is for the purpose of making and maturing disciples to strengthen existing and to establish new local churches.

The Mission of God is first in the assembly, then through the assembly. Elders are to teach the Word of God, pray for those over whom they are shepherds and shepherd the sheep through regularly contact. This teaching is to be systematic and appropriate. An equipped saint is both mature and secure. They understand who God is, what He has done, and who they are in Him. They are strong and steadfast, thus not easily swayed by the false teachers who would attack sound doctrine.

The Deacons of the assembly are to enable the Elders to carry out the ministry of word, prayer, and oversight.

The constitution of WBC calls for qualified Elders and Deacons, but never at the expense of lowering the standard that accompanies God’s call on the life. As an Elder of this fellowship, I vigorously invite you to pray for those who currently occupy the offices and to pray that God will continue to set aside men who carry the gifting for shepherding and men and women who would come alongside the Elders and congregation as Deacons and Deaconesses.

THE BIG PICTURE:

- The Birth of the Church in the Story of God
- The Centrality of the Church in the Mission of God
- **The Structure of the Church for the Mission of God**
- The Purpose of the Church in identifying, equipping, sending, and supporting

Its Eternal Value:

In the story of God, He has determined that His mission would be carried out by His people who assemble in geographically distinct areas under a biblically identifiable structure and

mission. To tamper with these three categories will hinder the Christ-centered expression in the community, the nation, and the world.

The Problem:

In accepting the local church as God's primary means of carrying out His mission, there is often a reluctance to accept the biblical structure of Elders and Deacons. Our inability to accept God's pattern impedes the carrying out of His mission in and through the church.

The Storyline:

In the telling of God's story, there is a notable progression of development. The Gospels speak of "Apostles." The Book of Acts begins with Apostles and starts to address the need for those who "minister the tables" (Acts 6:1ff). It also, without fanfare, introduces the office of Elder (Acts 20:17). From Acts it appears you have Apostles who are Elders and the inception of Deacons. The Pastoral Letters clearly speak to the character and ministry of Elders and Deacons (2 Tim. 1; Titus 3). The chronology in which the various books are written contributes to this progression of development.

Never do those appointed by the Holy Spirit as shepherds ever replace the Chief Shepherd. Yet the New Testament record never separate shepherds from sheep. God, in His wisdom, placed in the local churches shepherds or Elders for the feeding and protecting of His sheep. Sheep without shepherds are depicted as vulnerable and weak (Ezek. 34:1ff; Matt. 9:36). It is equally true there is no such thing as churches without Deacons or Deacons without churches. The offices of Deacon and Elder are inseparably linked.

Questions:

1. Can a Local Church function without identifiable leadership? If so, when is a Local Church a Local Church?
2. The other side of this is equally true, when is a gathered assembly of believers not a Local Church?
3. Should an individual be identified as a Pastor/Elder/Bishop outside the context of a Local Church? Does a title alone qualify an individual to occupy the office?
4. Are there certain qualifications found in the New Testament that would guide a Pastor in fulfilling His responsibilities in shepherding the people of God?
5. Is there any biblical distinction between one who is an Elder, Bishop, and Pastor?
6. What are the functions of a Pastor inside the Local Church?
7. Should an individual without the gift be in the office?
8. Does giftedness constitute the call to fill the office of Pastor?
9. Who appoints a Pastor to office?
10. Can more than one individual fill the office of Pastor?
11. What does it mean to be an Elder led Local Church?
12. Are there certain qualifications for the individual who might occupy the office of Pastor?
13. What are the responsibilities of the "flock" to the shepherds?

The Holy Spirit is calling to us from this passage to consider three ideas.

To Know: The Holy Spirit desires for us to know how He is working in and through the Elders and Deacons of local churches.

To Choose: The Holy Spirit desires for us to choose to embrace the biblical structure for local churches.

To Feel: The Holy Spirit desires for us to feel the joy of seeing the work of God unfold in and through His church.

Our study over the next two weeks will follow the development of the two offices within the local church canonically through the New Testament record. What initially appears rudimentary becomes more structured and developed as we work through the Book of Acts and conclude with Paul's Letters. We will begin in Acts 1.

Outline:

- I. The Apostles were set apart by Jesus Christ to carry out His mission (Acts 1:2).
 1. They were picked by God (Acts 1:2).

Although there were already "Elders" in and to the nation of Israel (Acts 4:5, 8, 23), initially Apostles appear distinct and of the church. It appears there were other Apostles beside the initial thirteen men (Acts 16:7).

2. They perpetuated God's story (Acts 2:42).

⁴² "**They were continually** devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. . . ⁴⁶ **Day by day continuing** with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart" (Acts 2:42, 46).

3. They performed many wonders and signs (Acts 2:43; 4:33; 5:12).

Those original Apostles had the power to parrot the ministry of Jesus.

4. They provided leadership to the early church (Acts 4:35).

"and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need" (Acts. 4:35).

In the absence of those who "wait on tables," the leadership met the need. When this became overbearing, the office of Deacon was established. Although it would appear that the people chosen to "serve tables" were men of dignity, their character was indicative of a larger group

of people. We think Elders and Deacons are people of exceptional character, but those qualities noted in the listings of Timothy and Titus is to represent all men and women of the church.

5. They focused on the ministry of prayer and Word (Acts 6:1-5; 1 Tim. 5:17).

“The Elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, **especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching**” (1 Tim. 5:17).

It is of interest to see how the narrowness of ministry evolved as need grew in other areas. The work of the Deacon or congregant is not beneath the Elder. Both works are necessary. But if the Elder does the work of the Deacon or congregant, then he is not doing the work of Elder. **The language of Acts 6:2 is telling. If the Apostles picked up the serving of table, then they would lay down the ministry of Word.** The work to which the Apostles were called was prayer and word. Both of these activities were to be done with devotion and persistency and perseverance.

It is impossible to gauge or monitor the ministry of prayer, but it is something that every Elder must make a priority. All Elder must be apt to teach, yet not all Elders excel in this area. Some are notably the “teachers” whereas others, although able to teach, will instruct in other venues. I will expand on this area in the coming study. What I find arresting is the divine commentary on the church when they get this idea correct. Notice how Acts 6:7 reads.

“The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7).

Oh may God open our eyes to the power of His church in the communities in which they serve and exist.

6. They identified and “commissioned [‘laying on hands’]” those who would serve as Deacons (Acts 6:6), Elders (1 Tim. 4:14; 5:22), and church planters (Acts 13:1-5).

“And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, **they laid their hands on them**” (Acts 6:6).

“Then, **when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them**, they sent them away” (Acts 13:3).

“When **they had appointed Elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting**, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed” (Acts 14:23).

“Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with **the laying on of hands by the presbytery**” (1 Tim. 4:14).

“Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thereby share responsibility for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin” (1 Tim. 5:22).

“For this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through **the laying on of my hands**” (2 Tim. 1:6).

Paul appointed Elders in every church. This pattern indicates that the appointment of Elders is normative. It was for this reason, Titus was left in Crete.

“For this reason I left you in Crete, that **you would set in order what remains and appoint Elders in every city as I directed you**” (Titus 1:5).

I do not believe in Elder succession, but I do believe Elders appoint other Elders. Paul and Titus’ appointment of Elders was the means used by the Holy Spirit to identify and set these men apart. It is for this reason, as Elders we believe the call to be an Elder is not only subjective (1 Tim. 3:1), but strongly objective. For a person to identify themselves as an Elder who has not been commissioned by Elders of a local church would be presumptuous and potentially dangerous.

7. They assisted and facilitated theological questions (Acts 15:6).

“And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the Apostles and Elders **concerning this issue**” (Acts 15:2).

“The Apostles and the Elders came together **to look into this matter**” (Acts 15:6).

“and they sent this letter by them, ‘The Apostles and the brethren who are Elders, to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings’” (Acts 15:23).

“Now while they were passing through the cities, **they were delivering the decrees which had been decided upon by the Apostles and Elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe**” (Acts 16:4).

I believe the gift to teach is always accompanied by the gift of study. If you do not wish to study, then by all means do not teach. I believe Elders should lead the way in theological training. I believe churches should be deeply involved in the training of the next generation of Elders and Deacons.

In the church at Jerusalem, Apostles and Elders dealt with significant doctrinal issues. It is for this reason and others I believe Elders should be theological astute. They must be students of the Word and people who know the issues of their times. They cannot be theological “turtles” who tuck their heads into their shells every time a theologically difficult issue threatens the church or become biblical “ostriches” who stick their heads in the proverbial sand to avoid any unpleasant conflict. Every believer needs to be well grounded in biblical truth, but the leadership must be. This is their responsibility.

The reason why he must be theologically sound and able to teach is spelled out for us in Titus 1:9-11 and Acts 20:28ff.

⁹ “holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, **so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.** ¹⁰ For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, ¹¹ who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain” (Titus 1:9-11).

²⁸ “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. ²⁹ **I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;** ³⁰ **and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.** ³¹ **Therefore be on the alert,** remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. ³² And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. ³³ I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes” (Acts 20:28-33).

Let us not deceive ourselves and believe this was only a problem in the early church. This problem still exists, and the Elders of the church are to guard the Bride of Christ from this theological and moral corruption. Let us equally not deceive ourselves into believing these “wolves in sheep’s clothing” are not likeable and attractive. They will come as angels of light. Paul reminds the church of Corinth this truth in the eleventh chapter of 2 Corinthians.

¹¹ “Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do! ¹² But what I am doing I will continue to do, so that I may cut off opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the matter about which they are boasting. ¹³ **For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.** ¹⁴ **No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.** ¹⁵ **Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds**” (2 Cor. 11:11-15).

Friend, we need men who know the Bible and are able to use it in such a manner as to instruct the flock of God in good things and to protect the flock of God from bad things. We already

noted how the Apostles assisted and facilitated theological discussion within the local assemblies.

The men who occupy the office must give themselves to study, and the local assembly should make every means available for the Elders to pursue theological study and ministry enrichment. Titus was left by the Apostle Paul to set things in order. Appointing Elders is part of the process of setting things in order. An overseer must be of sound character and skilled in the Word of God so as to be able to exhort and refute.

At this point in the story, Apostles and Elders appear to be on the same level of authority.

II. Soon there appear both Apostles and Elders in the church (Acts 11:30; 15:2, 22).

Both the Apostles and Elders appear as leadership and carry an element of headship in the local assemblies.

1. Although *leading the whole church*, they also worked *with the whole church* (Acts 15:22, 23).
2. The Apostles and Elders spoke *for the whole church* (Acts 15:23).
3. The Apostles and Elders had influence to establish “the decrees for them to keep” (Acts 16:4).

The idea of Elder is common both for the nation of Israel and that of the church ([Israel] Acts 4:5, 8, 23; 6:12; [church] 11:30; misc.). The position warranted esteem.

III. Apostles were a part of a larger group of gifted people along with Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers (1 Cor. 12:28, 29).

I personally lean toward the idea that all four categories function in the role of Elder. Some Elders are Apostles, some are Prophets, some Evangelists, some Pastor/Teacher. Similar to our first point in Acts 1:2, those who occupy the office are set there by God. The language is parallel to that found in Ephesians 4:11, “And He gave some as . . .”

There appears to be a possible order as to sequence in church planting such as Apostles first, then Prophets, then Teachers. It would appear possible that perhaps those with the gift and office of Apostle, Prophet, and Evangelist were the ones opening up new fields and starting new churches whereas the Pastors and Teachers were the ones who stayed with a flock for long-term discipleship and instruction (Eph. 4:11ff). This idea appears to have weight from a passage like Ephesians 2:20.

Such gifted offices were for the local church or churches. Such men would be commissioned by a local church but their calling would be confirmed by other Elders in other local churches.

IV. By the end of Acts, Elders were a real part of all local churches (Acts 20:17).

“From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him **the Elders of the church**” (Acts 20:17).

“And the following day Paul went in with us to James, and **all the Elders were present**” (Acts 21:18).

“Is anyone among you sick? Then **he must call for the Elders of the church** and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord” (James 5:14).

Elders were placed in and over local churches by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of watching over the flock of God. The Church at Ephesus had Elders previously appointed by Paul. Paul reminds them that they are overseers and shepherds. They must protect the church against “savage wolves” from outside and arising from within.

Shepherding the Sheep (What’s the NEXT STEP?)

The issue of Elders and Deacons is not up for debate. The issue is what do they do and what is to be our relationship to them. Let us leave considering the following three questions.

1. How do you view your elders?
2. What do the words, “Overseer, Elder, and Shepherd” communicate to you?
3. What is the relationship you have to the elders?

In light of these questions, let us ask God to give us an open heart and mind as it relates to this subject matter, and then ask Him to conform us to His image in this matter.